

U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



RANKING MEMBER *Special Committee on Aging*

Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act

The allied health workforce is in need of diversification. Professionals in the fields of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology and audiology are overwhelmingly Caucasian. A 2018 workforce study conducted by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) found that over 92 percent of occupational therapists identified as Caucasian, 3.1 percent identified as African-American, 3.2 percent identified as Hispanic and 1.4 percent identified as multi-ethnic. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) reports that only eight percent of SLPs are non-Caucasian. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) reports that only 13 percent of PTs in the country are non-Caucasian.

In addition to the lack of ethnic diversity in these allied health fields, the number of practicing professionals with disabilities is less than five percent according to AOTA. Exacerbating the lack of disabled professionals is the fact that most allied health professionals with disabilities enter the field after their own treatment and therefore are often late career professionals.

The population of people treated by OTs, PTs, SLPs, and audiologists is far more diverse than the professionals treating them. According to the Institutes of Medicine, over 40 percent of individuals receiving therapeutic treatment are non-Caucasian. An Institutes of Medicine report found that patients that receive treatment from professionals of similar ethnic background often trust their therapists more and are more likely to follow-through on their treatment.

The Allied Health Diversity Workforce Act would create a \$5 million a year grant program that would provide grants and stipends for students of diverse ethnic backgrounds or students with disabilities in programs preparing occupational therapists, physical therapist, speech-language pathologists and audiologists. The bill is time limited, providing grants to eligible universities and other preparation programs for a total of five years. There is a companion bill in the House (H.R. 3637) introduced by Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL-1st) and Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA-5th).

Original co-sponsor: Sen. Lisa Murkowski

Organizations Supporting the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act: University of Pittsburgh School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Alaska Anchorage College of Health, Temple University College of Public Health, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, Pennsylvania Physical Therapy Association, Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association, Alaska Physical Therapy Association, Alaska Speech-Language-Hearing Association, National Black Association of Speech-Language and Hearing, National Black Occupational Therapy Caucus, Multicultural Diversity & Inclusion Networks, Occupational Therapy Network for Native Americans, Terapia Ocupacional para Diversidad, Oportunidad y Solidaridad, Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity, American Academy of Audiology, American Occupational Therapy Association, American Physical Therapy Association, American Academy of Physical Therapy, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

To co-sponsor the legislation or for more information or questions about the bill contact Michael Gamel-McCormick (michael_gamel-mccormick@aging.senate.gov) or Angela Ramponi (Angela_Ramponi@murkowski.senate.gov).